THE JAPANESE PRINT

AN INTERPRETATION

BY FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

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An Interpretation

The unpretentious colored wood-cut of Japan is a lesson to the West, significant not only as graven lines on delicate paper which has kissed the color from carved and variously tinted wooden blocks, and helpful in the practice of the fine arts, but to be construed with profit in other life-concerns as great.

It is especially valuable because, in order to comprehend it at all, we must take a viewpoint which to us as a people, and in particular to our artists, is unfamiliar,—the purely aesthetic viewpoint. It is a safe means of inspiration for our artists because, while the methods are true methods, the resultant forms are utterly alien to such artistic tradition as we acknowledge and endeavor to make effective.

So, I will neglect the smattering of information as to artists and periods easily obtained from any one* of several available works on the subject and try to tell what these colored engravings are in themselves, and more particularly of their cultural use

*"Japanese Color Prints," Von Seidlitz, best book extant on the subject. "The Masters of Ukioye," and "History of the Ukioye," Prof. Fennollosa. "Japanese Illustrations," Dr. Wm. Anderson. "Japanese Illustrations" and "Japanese Woodcuts," E. S. Strange.

to us, in awakening the artistic conscience, or at least in making us feel the disgrace of not realizing the fact we have none.

Go deep enough into your experience to find that beauty is in itself the finest kind of morality, ~~at~~ ethical, purely — the essential fact, I mean, of all morals and manners— and you may personally feel in these aesthetic abstractions of the Japanese ~~mind~~ the innocent and vivid joy which, by reason of obviously established sentiment, is yours in the flowers of field or garden.

A flower is beautiful, we say—but why? Because in its geometry and in its sensuous qualities it is an embodiment and significant expression of that precious something in ourselves which we instinctively know to be Life, "An eye looking out upon us from the great inner sea of beauty", a proof of the eternal harmony in the nature of a universe which is too vast and intimate and real for ~~the~~ mere intellect to seize. ~~We~~ Intuitively grasp something of it when we affirm that "the flower is beautiful". And when we say, "It is beautiful," we mean that the quality in us which is our very life recognizes itself there or at least what is its very own: So there vibrates in us a sympathetic chord struck mystically by the flower. Now, as it is with the flower, so ~~it~~ is with any work of

art and to an even greater degree; because a work of fine art is a blossom of the human soul, and so more humanly intimate. In it we find the lineaments of man's thought and the exciting traces of man's feeling,—so to say, the very human touch, offered to us in terms of the same qualities that make us exclaim that the flower is beautiful; and it is this quality of absolute and essential beauty in the result of the artist's creative efforts that is the Life of the work of art, more truly than any literal import or adventitious significance it may possess. But it is the quick, immediate perception of this subjective quality, or rather, perhaps, the ability to perceive it instinctively in the work of art, that is lacking in us—as a people. Failing in this perception we are untouched by the true vitalizing power of art, and remain without the precincts of the temple, in a realm, literal, objective, realistic, therefore, unreal. In art that which is really essential escapes us for lack of a "disciplined power to see."

The most important fact to realize in a study of this subject is that, with all its informal grace, Japanese art is a thoroughly structural Art; fundamentally so in any and every medium. It is always, whatever else it is or is not, structural. The realization of

the primary importance of this element of "structure" is also at the very beginning of any real knowledge of design. And at the beginning of structure lies always and everywhere geometry. But, in this art, mathematics begins and ends here, as the mathematical begins and ends in music, however organically inherent here as there in the result.

But we have used the word structure, taking for granted that we agreed upon its meaning. The word structure is here used to designate an organic form, an organization in a very definite manner of parts or elements into a larger unity,—a vital whole. So, in design, that element which we call its structure is primarily the pure form, as arranged or fashioned and grouped to "build" the Idea; an idea which must always persuade us of its reasonableness. Geometry is the grammar, so to speak, of the form. It is its architectural principle. But there is a psychic correlation between the geometry of form and our associated ideas which constitutes its symbolic value. There resides always a certain "spell power" in any geometric form which seems more or less a mystery, and is, as we say, the soul of the thing. It would carry us far from our subject if we should endeavor to render an

accurate, convincing account of the reason why certain geometric forms have come to symbolize for us and potently to suggest certain human ideas, moods, sentiments,—as for instance: the circle, infinity; the triangle, structural unity; the spire, aspiration; the spiral, organic progress; the square, integrity. It is nevertheless a fact that more or less clearly in the subtle differentiations of these elemental geometric forms, we do sense a certain psychic quality which we may denominate the "spell-power" of the form, and with which the artist freely plays, as much at home with it as the musician at his key-board with his notes. A Japanese artist grasps form always by reaching underneath for its geometry, never losing sight of its spiritual efficacy. No matter how informal, vague, evanescent, the subject he is treating may seem to be, he recognizes and acknowledges geometry as its esthetic skeleton; that is to say—not its structural skeleton alone, but,—by virtue of what we have termed the symbolic spell-power—it is also the suggestive soul of his work. A Japanese artist's power of geometrical analysis seems upon close study, little short of miraculous. An essential geometry he sees in everything, only, perhaps, to let it vanish in mystery for the beholder of his finished

work. But even so, escaping as it does at first the critical eye, its influence is the more felt. By this sense for geometric form and symbol-value he has the gist of getting to the hidden core of reality. However fantastic his imaginative world may be it competes with the actual and subdues it by superior loveliness and human meaning. The forms, for instance, in the pine tree, (as of every natural object on the earth), the geometry that underlies and constitutes the peculiar pine character of the tree—what Plato meant by the eternal idea—he knows familiarly. The unseen is to him visible. A circle and a straight line or two, rhythmically repeated, prescribe for him its essentials perfectly. He knows as thoroughly its textures and color qualities. Having these by heart, he is master of the pine and builds trees to suit his purpose and feeling, each as truly a pine and a pine only as the one from which he wrung the secret. So, from flying bird to breaking wave, from Fujiyama to a petal of the blossoming cherry afloat upon the stream, he is master, free to create at will. Nor are these forms to him mere spectres, or flimsy guesses;—not fictitious semblances, to which he can with impunity do violence. To him they are fundamental verities of structure, pre-existing and surviving

particular embodiments in his material world.

What is true of the pine tree, for and by itself, is no less true in the relation of the tree to its environment. The Japanese artist studies its pine tree nature not only in its import and bearing but lovingly understands it in its habitat and natural element as well—which, if the geometry be called the grammar, may by equal privilege of figurative speech, be termed the syntax. To acquire this knowledge, he devotes himself to the tree, observes it analytically yet sympathically; then he leaves it, and with his brush begins to feel for its attitude and intimate relations as he remembers them. He proceeds from visualized generals to definite particulars in this contemplative study and as soon as he has recognized really the first elements constituting the skeleton of the structure, which you may see laid bare in the analysis by Hokusai, his progress in its grammar and syntax is rapid. The Japanese artist, by virtue of the shades of his ancestors, is born a trained observer; but only after a long series of patient studies, does he consider that he knows his subject. However, he has naturally the ready ability to seize upon essentials, which is the prime condition of the artist's creative insight.

* A rare set of such analyses by Hokusai was exhibited at the Chicago Universal Exposition. This book was used.

Were all pine trees, then, to vanish suddenly from the earth he could, from this knowledge, furnish plans and specifications for the varied portrayal of a true species—because what he has learned and mastered and made his own is the specific and distinguishing nature of the pine tree. Using this word Nature in the Japanese sense I do not of course mean that outward aspect which strikes the eye as a visual image of a scene strikes the ground glass of a camera, but that inner harmony which penetrates the outward form or letter, and is its determining character;-that quality in the thing (to repeat what we have said before) that is its significance and it's Life for us,—what Plato called (with reason, we see, psychological if not metaphysical) the "eternal idea of the thing."

We may refer, then, to the nature of a "proposition" as to the nature of an animal, of a plant, of an atmosphere or a building material. Nature, in this sense, is not to be studied much in books. They are little more than the by-product of other men's ideas of the thing, which in order to distill from it his own particular sense of its intrinsic poetry the artist must know at first-hand. He must find this poetry in the thing for himself, the poetry it holds in reserve for

him and him alone, by patient, sympathetic study. This brings us to the aesthetics of Japanese art.

Ideas exist for us by virtue alone of form. The form can never be detached from the idea; the means must be perfectly adapted to the end. So in this art the problem of form and style is an organic problem solved easily and finally. Always we find the one line, the one arrangement that will exactly serve. It is an art facile, incapable of adequate analysis, for it is the felicity of an intuitive state of mind and must, on the part of the student, be similarly recognized by intuition.

In these works you will find only what is absolutely needed to convey the artist's meaning. It fits with poetic justice whatever feeling it intends to convey. These simple colored engravings are indeed a language whose purpose is absolute beauty, inspired by the Japanese need of that precise expression of the beautiful, which to him is reality immeasureably more than the natural objects from which he wrested the secret of their being. This expression of the beautiful is with him inevitable and there inheres therefore in the result that inevitableness which we feel in all things lovely. This process of wood block printing is but one mod-

est medium through which, or by means of which, he may express his inward sense of things, and which he justifies in his characteristic, and highly expressive fashion.

So, these prints are designs, patterns, in themselves beautiful as such; and, what other meanings they may have are merely incidental, interesting or curious by-products.

Broadly stated then, the first and supreme principle of Japanese aesthetics consists in a stringent simplification by elimination of the insignificant, and consequent emphasis of reality. The first prerequisite for the successful study of this strange art is to fix in mind at the beginning the fact that it is the sentiment of Nature alone which concerns the Japanese artist; of Nature as beheld by him in those vital meanings which he alone sees, and alone therefore endeavors to portray. The Japanese, by means of this process, become to him by this habit of study almost instinctive, casts what to us appears a glamour over everything. He is a true poet. Surely life in Old Japan must have been a perpetual communion with the divine heart of Nature. For Nippon drew its racial inspiration from, and framed its civilization in accord with a native perception of Nature-law. Nippon made its body of morals and

customs a strict conventionalization of her nature forms and processes; in itself as a whole her civilization becoming thereby a true work of art. No more valuable object lesson was ever afforded civilization than this instance of a people who have made of their land and the buildings upon it, of their gardens, their manners and garb, their utensils, adornments, and their very gods, a single consistent whole, a unit inspired by a living sympathy with Nature, spontaneous and inevitable. To the smallest fraction of Japanese lives what was divorced from Nature was reclaimed by Art, and so redeemed. And what was thus the rule established progressively in individual and social life, making of it an art,—a thing of strange and poignant beauty,—dominated all popular art production and furnished the criterion of its products.

This process of elimination of the insignificant we find to be their first and most important consideration as artists, after the fundamental mathematics of structure. A Japanese may tell you what he knows in a single drawing, but never will he attempt to tell you all he knows. He is quite content to lay stress upon a simple element, insignificant enough perhaps before he has handled it; when, (as we find again and again in the

works of Korin and his school) the very slight means employed touches the soul of the subject so surely and intimately that while less would have failed of the intended effect, more would have been profane. This process of simplification is in a sense a dramatization of the subject, just as all Japanese ceremonials are the common offices and functions of their daily life delicately dramatized in little. The tea ceremony is an instance. Nothing more than the most gracefully perfect way of making and serving a cup of tea! Yet, you may have to admit, a more elegant and impressive ceremonial than many a modern religious service. To dramatize, is always to conventionalize; to conventionalize is, in a sense, to simplify; and so these drawings are all conventional patterns subtly geometrical, imbued at the same time with symbolic value, but with the very symbolism honestly built upon a mathematical basis, as the woof of the weave is built upon the warp. It has little in common with the literal. It is more akin to a delicate musical instrument that needs no lifted dampers or loud pedals. Fleshly shade nor materialistic shadow is necessary to it, for in itself it is no more than a pure living sentiment.

Were we to contrast the spiritual grace of

our simple wild flowers, with the material richness of our doubled varieties under cultivation, we would institute a fair comparison of this unpretentious art of the East and the more pretentious art of the West. Where the art of Japan is a poetic symbol, much of ours is an attempt at realism, that succeeds only in being rather pitifully literal. Where the one is delicately sensuous, the other is only too apt to be stupidly sensual.

This intuition of the Japanese artist for dramatizing his subject is no finer than his touch and tact is unerring. He knows materials, and never falsifies them. He knows his tools, and never abuses them. And this, just because he apprehends the secret of character at every chance contact with the actual. In the slight wash drawings of the Kakemono, we find a more sheer and delicate manifestation of reserve than in this more popular, and in a sense therefore, more vulgar form of expression. Latent always, however, in the slightest and seemingly most informal designs, through the least of these works as through the greatest, the geometric structure effects a potent spell. No composition can we find not affected by it and that does not bear this psychic spell meanwhile, as if unconscious of its precious burden, its efficient causes enwoven and

subtly hid between the lines of its geometric forms. As the poor saint was believed to bear his mystic nimbus, so each humble masterpiece asserts its magic of invisible perfection. Yet, this mystery is reduced by Japanese masters to its scientific elements, as exemplified by certain pages of textbooks by Hokusai,* wherein the structural diagrams are clearly given, and transformation to material objects shown progressively step by step.

This primitive graphic art, like all true art, has its limitations firmly fixed; in this case more narrowly fixed than in any art we know. Strictly within these limitations, however, the fertility and resource of the Japanese mind produced a range of aesthetic inventions that runs the whole gamut of sentiment, besides reproducing with faithfulness the costumes, manners and customs of a unique and remarkable civilization, constituting its most valuable record, without violating a single aesthetic tradition.

The faces in these drawings repel the novice and chill the student accustomed to less pure aesthetic abstractions; and the use of the human form in unrealistic fashion has often been explained on the ground of religious scruples. Nothing more than the aesthetic consideration involved is necessary to

* Edition on lines of Japanese analytics.

justify it. The faces in these drawings are "in place", harmonious with the rest, and one may actually satisfy oneself on the subject by observing how the tendency toward realism in the faces portrayed by Kiyonaga and Toyokuni vulgarized results artistically, introducing as they did thereby this element —for the same reason, no doubt, that actors sometimes play to the applauding gallery. The faces as found in the prints of the great periods were the Japanese countenance dramatized, to use the term once more. They were masks, conventions, the visual image of the ethnic character of a people varied by each artist for himself. A close student may identify the work of any particular artist by merely ascertaining his particular variation thereof, the print being otherwise totally concealed. Although an actor was portrayed in many different roles, the individuality of the countenance, its character, was held throughout in the mask.

You may never fail to recognize Danjuro in all the various drawings he inspired, and you may recognize others when you have made their acquaintance. But the means by which this was accomplished is so slight, that the convention is scarcely disturbed, and no realism taints the result. A realistic countenance to please us would vulgarize

the whole, for it would violate the aesthetic law of the structure. You find something like this typical face in the work of the pre-Raphaelites, Burne-Jones and Rosetti. These are often inanities as distressing as the more legitimate conventions of the Japanese are satisfying, because they were made in a more or less literal setting; the whole being inorganic and inconsistent. You will find something of this conventionalizing tendency employed more consistently and artistically in a Morris prose epic or verse tale, or in Spencer's "Fairy Queen" where raging knightly battles and frightful episodes move quietly remote and sedate across the enchanted reader's field of mental vision, affecting him simply by their picturesque outlines and charm of color, as might an old arras.

The use of color, always in the flat,—that is,—without chiaroscuro,—plays a wonderful but natural part in the production of this Art and is responsible largely for its charm. It is a means grasped and understood as perfectly as the rhythm of form and line, and made in its way as significant. It affords a means of emphasizing and differentiating the forms themselves, at the same time that it constitutes in itself an element of the pattern. The blacks are always placed flat in

the pattern, as a pattern for itself,—a wheel within a wheel. Comments are often made on their wonderfully successful use of deep blacks but the other colors at their command are used as successfully, according to the same method, to an identical if less emphatic effect.

As we see the prints today, it must be confessed that time has imbued the color with an added charm. The old vegetable dyes, saturating and qualified by the soft texture of the wonderful paper, soften and change with the sunlight of the moist climate, much as do the colors in oriental rugs. The blues become beautiful yellows; the purples soft browns; the beni, or light red, fades to a luminous pink; while a certain cool green, together with the translucent greys and the brilliant red lead are unchangeable. The tenderness of tone found in fine prints is indescribable. This is, in great part, due to the action of time on the nature of the dye stuffs or pigments employed. When first printed, they were comparatively crude, and much of the credit formerly given by connoisseurs to the printer should be accredited to age. When first printed, also, there was a certain conventionalized symbolism in the use of color, which time confuses. The sky was then

usually grey or blue, sometimes yellow; the water blue; grass green; garments polychromatic; woodwork red lead, pink or yellow. Owing to the manner in which the color was brushed upon the block, few prints are exactly alike, and sometimes great liberty was taken with the color by the printer, most interesting differentiations of color occurring in different prints from the same block. In itself, this color element in the Japanese print is a delight,—an absolute felicity, unrivalled in charm by the larger means employed in more pretentious mediums. The prints afford a liberal education in color values, especially as related to composition. A perfect color balance is rarely wanting in the final result, and although certain qualities in this result are in a sense adventitious, yet it should be strongly insisted, after all, that the foundation for the miracles of harmonious permutation was properly laid by the artist himself.

In this wedding of color and gracious form, we have finally what we call a good decoration. The ultimate of a Japanese print will be measured by the extent to which it distills, or rather exhales, this precious quality, called "decorative." We as a people do not quite understand what that means and we are apt to use the term slight-

ingly as compared with art which has supposedly some other and greater mission. I for myself don't know exactly what other mission it legitimately could have, but I am sure of this, at least—that the rhythmic play of parts, the poise and balance, the repose that these qualities attain to and impart and which together constitute what we call good decoration, are really the very life of all art whatsoever, and in any event of a color print. In the degree that the print possesses this quality, it is abidingly precious; this quality determines—constitutes, its intrinsic value.

As to the subject matter of the figure pieces, it is true that the stories they tell are mainly of the Yoshiwara, or celebrate the lover and the Geisha, but with an innocence incomprehensible to us; for Japan at that time,—although the family was the unit of her civilization,—had not made monopoly of the sex relation the shameless essence of this institution, and the Yoshiwara was the center of the literary and artistic life of the common people. Their fashions were set by the Yoshiwara. The Geisha, whose place in Japanese society was the same as that of the Greek Hetaira, or her ancient Hindu equivalent, as she appears for instance in the Hindu comedy, the "Little Clay Cart,"*

*Note:—Translated in the Harvard Oriental Series.

not less in her ideal perfection than was Aspasia, beloved of Pericles. The Geisha was perhaps the most exquisite product, scandalous as the fact may appear, of an exquisite civilization. She was in society the living Japanese work of art: thoroughly trained in music, literature and the rarest and fairest amenities of life; she was herself the crowing amenity and poetic refinement of their life This all must recognize and comprehend; else we shall be tempted by false shames and Puritan misrepresentations to resent the theme of so many of the loveliest among the prints, and by a quite stupid dogmatism disallow our aesthetic delight in their charm. But we have very likely said enough of the print in itself; let us pass on to consider what it has already done for us and what it may yet do. We have seen that this art exists—in itself a thing of beauty—inspired by the need of expressing the common life in organic terms, having itself the same integrity, considered in its own nature, as the flower. Caught and bodied forth there by human touch is a measure of that inner harmony which we perceive as a proof of goodness and excel-

It exists, a material means for us to a spiritual end, perhaps more essentially prophetic in function than it was to the people for

which it came into candid and gracious being. It has already spoken to us a message of esthetic and ethical import. Indeed, its spirit has already entered and possessed the soul and craft of many men of our race and spoken again through them more intimately and convincingly than ever. It is that message we recognize in familiar accents uttered by Whistler, Manet, Monet, the "Pleinair" school of France, Puvis du Chavanne, Boutet de Monvel, and through them it has further spread its civilizing, because its conventionalizing, simplifying, clarifying influence to the arts and crafts of the occident on both sides of the Atlantic. Every dead-wall in the land bears witness to the direct or indirect influence of this humble Japanese Art of the people; for it has given us what we call "poster art." Because of it, in England Aubrey Beardsley and his kith lived and wrought. Modern France, the first to discover its charm, has fallen under its spell completely; and French art and Parisian fashions feel its influence more from year to year. The German and Austrian secessionist movement owes it a large debt of gratitude. Yet the influence of this art is still young. The German mind has only recently awakened to its significance, and proceeds now with characteristic thoroughness

to ends only half discerned. It has spread abroad the gospel of simplification as no other modern agency has preached it, and has taught that organic integrity within the work of art itself is fundamentally the law of beauty. Without it work may be a meretricious mask, with literal suggestion or sensual effect, but it cannot become true art. That quality in the work which is "real" escapes and the would-be artist remains where he belongs—outside the sanctuary. It has shown us that no more than a sand bank and the sea, or a foreground, a telegraph pole and a weed in proper arrangement may yield a higher message of love and beauty, a surer proof of life than the sentimentality of Raphael or Angelo's magnificent pictorial sculpture. Chaste and delicate, it has taught that healthy and wholesome sentiment has nothing in common with sentimentality, or sensuous feeling with banal sensuality; that integrity of means to ends is in art indispensable to the poetry of so-called inspired results; and that the inspiring life of the work of art consists and inheres, has its very breath and creative being within the work itself; an integrity, in fine, as organic as anything that grows in the great out-of-doors.

Owing to its marked ethnic eccentricity,

this art is a particularly safe means of cultivation for us, because the individual initiative of the artist is not paralyzed by forms which he can use as he finds them,—ready made. It may become most useful on this very account, as a corrector of the fatal tendency to imitation,—be the antidote to the very poison it might administer to the weak and unwary—to that corrupting, stultifying, mechanical parasitism that besets and betrays so often to his ruin, in these days of hustle and drive, the eager and ambitious artist. For the architect, particularly, it is a quickening inspiration, without attendant perils, owing to its essentially structural character and diverse materials and methods. To any and all artists it must offer great encouragement, because it is so striking a proof of the fact readily overlooked—that to the true artist his limitations are always, if not understood and rightly wooed, his most faithful and serviceable friends.

Now, if there is a culture we might acquire whereby the beautiful may be apprehended as such, a study that will help restore to us the fine instinctive perception of and worship for the beautiful, which should be our universal birthright, instead of the distorted ideas, the materialistic perversions

of which we are victims, we assuredly want to know what it is and how it may be had. Nothing can be just at this moment of greater importance to us educationally. For the laws of the beautiful are immutable as those of elementary physics, and no work sifted by them and found wanting can be a true work of art. The laws of the beautiful are like the laws of physics, not derived from external authority, nor have they regard to any ulterior utility. They pre-exist any perception of them; inhere, latent and effective, in man's nature and his world. They are not made by any genius, they are perceived first by the great artist and then revealed to mankind in his works. All varieties of form, line or color, all tendencies in any direction have, besides what value they may have acquired by virtue of the long cultural tradition recounting back to prehistoric man, a natural significance and inevitably express something. As these properties are combined, arranged and harmonized, expression is gained and modified. Even a discord is in a sense an expression—an expression of the devil or of decay. But the expression we seek and need is that of harmony or of the good; known otherwise as the true, often spoken of as the beautiful, and personified as God. It is folly to say that if the ear can

distinguish a harmonious combination of sounds, the eye cannot distinguish a harmonious combination of lines. For in the degree that the ear is sensitive to sound,—to the extent that it can appreciate the harmony of tones, in even a larger degree the eye will see and appreciate, if duly trained to attend to them, the expression of harmonies in form, line and color purely as such; and it is exactly harmonies of this kind, merely, which we find exemplified and exquisitely elucidated in Japanese prints.

Rhythmical and melodius combinations of tone have portrayed the individualities of great souls to us—a Bach, Beethoven or a Brahms; and while the practice of no musical rule of three could compass their art or sound the depths of their genius, there are definite laws of harmony and structure common to their art which are well known and systematically taught and imparted. So the mysterious impress of personality is revealed in certain qualities of this unpretentious art, as any even cursory observer must note, in the works of Harunobu, Shunsho, Kiyonaga, Hokusai and Hiroshige.

And the principles underlying and in a sense governing the expression of personal feelings and the feeling of personality as expressed in these prints, or for the matter

of that in any veritable work of art, have now been clearly formulated anew for many of us by assiduous study of their works. Questions of aesthetics may no longer be so readily spoken of, or referred to with flippancy, as mere negligible "matters of taste." Aside from their ethnic character,—the fact that the individuality of these expressions may be but the color, so to say, of some Japanese artist's soul,—such expressions do convey an ideal of the conditions they seek to satisfy, because of the simple reason that the expression was the sought and wrought response to their spiritual need, which nothing less or else would satisfy. Just as Beethoven at his keyboard imposed upon tone the very character of his soul, so by these simple colored drawings a similar revelation is achieved through the medium of dye stuffs and graven lines applied to sensitive paper, putting together its elements of expression in accord with the individual artist's brain and heart, and attaining to beauty as a result in so far as the artist was true to the limitations imposed upon him by the nature of the means he employed. He might merely characterize his subject and possess little more than the eye of the great craftsman; or he might idealize it according to the realizing insight of the great artist; but in either case to the

degree that the colors and lines were delightfully significant of the idea, the result would be a creative work of art.

Now, all the while, just as in any musical composition, there would be going on a conventionalizing process. To imitate the natural modeling of the subject in shade and shadow—or merely to render realistically its appearance and position—would require certain dexterity of hand and a mechanic's eye. But in the artist's mind there was a living conception at work—the Idea; the revelation of the Vision by means of the brush and dye stuffs and paper applied to engraved wooden blocks, with strict regard and devout respect for the limitations of his materials, and an active sympathy that makes all eloquent together; eloquent, however, in their own peculiar fashion as graven lines should be on sensitive paper which has received the color from the variously tinted blocks and wherein this process is frankly confessed; the confession itself becoming a delightful poetic circumstance. There results from all this a peculiar and exquisite language which is not literature telling a story regardless of the conditions of its structure. For of course a picture should be no imitation of anything, no pretended hole in the wall through which you glimpse a

story about something, or behold winter in summer or summer in winter. "Breaking Home Ties," for instance, nor any of its numerous kith and kin can be dignified as art. There are many degrees, to be sure, of kinship to "Breaking Home Ties" not so easy to detect, yet all of which bear the marks of vulgar pretense. The message of these Japanese prints is to educate us spiritually for all time beyond such banality.

Not alone in the realm of the painter is the message being heeled, but also in that of the musician, of the sculptor and of the architect.

In sculpture the antithesis of the lesson is found in the "Rogers Groups;" literal replicas of incidents that might perhaps make paintings, but which as sculpture are pitiful. Sculpture has three dimensions, possibilities of mass and silhouette, as well as definite limitations peculiar to itself, which to disregard is death to art. The classics living in our hearts today, the Venus, the Victory, and a long list of their noble peers are true sculpture. But the slavish following of literature has cursed both painter and sculptor. They have been tempted to endeavor to make their work accomplish what literary art may achieve so much better—forcing so their medium beyond its limits to its ut-

ter degradation. And this is as true of decorative art and architecture. The general principles to be deduced from this popular art of the Japanese readily apply to the problem of right aesthetic conventionalization of natural things, revealing the potential poetry of their nature as required for the life of these other arts. Hence this culture of the East brings to us of the West invaluable aid in the process of our civilization. We marvel, with a tinge of envy, at the simple inevitableness with which the life-principle in so slight a thing as a willow wand will find fullness of expression as a willow tree—a glorious sort of completeness —with that absolute repose which is as of a destiny fulfilled. Inevitably the secret of the acorn is the glory of the oak. The fretted cone arises as the stately pine, finding the fullness of a destined life in untrammeled expression of its life-principle simply, naturally and beautifully. Then we go to Nature that we may learn why there has been laid upon us an artificiality that blights and often conceals our very selves, and in mere course of time and the combined false education of our mistaken efforts, deforms past recognition the life-principle implanted in us originally for our personal growth as men and our expressive function as artists.

We find and feel always in Nature herself from zero to infinity, an accord of form and function with life-principle that seems to halt only with our attempted domestication of the infinite. Society seems to lose or set aside some rare and precious quality in the domesticating or civilizing, this conventionalizing process of ours. Striving for freedom we gain friction and discord for our pains. The wisest savants and noblest poets have therefor gone direct to Nature for the secret, there they hoped against hope to find the solution of this maddening, perplexing problem; the right ordering of human life. But however much we may love oak or pine in a state of nature their freedom is not for us. It belongs to us no longer, however much the after-glow of barbarism within us may make us yearn for it. Real civilization means for us, then, a right conventionalizing of our original state of nature, just such a conventionalizing as the true artist imposes on natural forms. The law-giver and reformer of social customs must have, however, the artist soul, the artist eye in directing this process, if the light of the race is not to go out. So, art is not alone the expression, but in turn the great conservator and transmitter of the finer sensibilities of a people. More still, it is to show those

who shall understand just where and how we shall bring coercion to bear upon the material of human conduct. So the indigenous art of a people is their only prophecy and their school of anointed prophets and kings. Our own art is the only light by which this conventionalizing process we call "civilization" may eventually make its institutions harmonious with the fairest conditions of our individual and social life.

I wish I might use another word than "conventionalizing" to convey the notion of this magic process of the artist mind, which is the constant haunting reference of this paper, because it is the perpetual insistent suggestion of this particular art we have discussed. Only an artist, or one with genuine artistic training is likely, I fear, to realize precisely what the word as here used connotes. Let me illustrate once more. To know a thing (what we can really call knowing), a man must first love the thing and sympathize vividly with it. Egypt thus knew the lotus, and translated the flower to the dignified stone forms of her architecture. Such was the lotus conventionalized. Greece knew and idealized the acanthus in stone translations. Thus was the acanthus conventionalized. If Egypt or Greece had plucked the flowers as they

grew, and given us a mere imitation of them in stone, the stone forms would have died with the original. In translating, however, its very life's principle into terms of stone well adapted to grace a column capital, the Egyptian artist made it pass through a rarifying spiritual process, whereby its natural character was really intensified and revealed in terms of stone adapted to an architectural use. The lotus gained thus imperishable significance; for the life-principle in the flower is translated—transmuted to terms of building stone to idealize a real need. This is conventionalization. It is reality because it is poetry. As the Egyptian took the lotus, the Greek the acanthus, and the Japanese every natural thing on earth, as we may take and adapt to our highest use in our own way a natural flower or thing, so civilization must take the natural man, to fit him for his place in this great piece of architecture we call the social state. And today, as centuries ago, it is the prophetic artist eye that must reveal this natural state idealized, conventionalized harmoniously with the life-principle of all men. How otherwise shall it be discerned? All the sheer wisdom of science, the cunning of politics and the prayers of religion can but stand and wait for the revelation,—await-

ing at the hands of the artist, that conventionalization of the free expression of the life-principle which shall make our social living beautiful, organically true. Behind all institutions or dogmatic schemes, whatever their worth may be, or their venerable antiquity,—behind them all is something produced and preserved for its aesthetic worth; the song of the poet, some artist vision, the pattern seen in the mount.

Now speaking a language all the clearer because not native to us, beggared as we are by material riches, the humble Japanese artist has become greatly significant because he is the interpreter of the one permanent thing in the life of his people; that one permanent thing being the principle of a right conventionalization of life which makes of their native forms the most humanly significant, and most humanly joy-giving, as in its ever varied moods, and in evanescent loveliness he has made Fujiyama—that image of man in the vast—the God of Nippon.

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